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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001132

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS
NSC FOR E.MILLARD
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/07/2014

TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [CASC](#) [CE](#) [PHSAPREL](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SUICIDE BOMBER HITS POLICE INSTEAD OF TAMIL
MINISTER AMID AN INCREASE IN VIOLENCE IN THE EAST

REF: A. (A) COLOMBO-OPS CENTER 07-07-04 TELCON

[1](#)B. (B) COLOMBO 1120

[1](#)C. (C) COLOMBO 1109 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead. Reason 1.5 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. On July 7, a suspected LTTE suicide bomber detonated herself at a local police station in Colombo. Four police officers were killed and at least 11 injured. The police station is located near the Chancery, but no Americans were injured, nor was the compound damaged. There is no evidence the bomber was targeting Americans or the Embassy. The assumed target of the bomber was anti-LTTE Tamil Minister Devananda, who has linked himself publicly to breakaway rebel Tiger Karuna in recent weeks. The bombing follows recent attacks on LTTE cadre and the arrest and release of possible pro-Karuna cadre apprehended for weapons possession, all in the east. While the Tigers have not claimed responsibility for today's bombing, they are the likely suspects. The larger question now is whether the incident is an isolated one or the beginning of a concerted military effort by the LTTE to break the ceasefire. Please see Para 7 for suggested press guidance. END SUMMARY.

Potential LTTE Suicide Bombing in Colombo

[1](#)2. (U) A suspected female Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) suicide bomber detonated herself at 12:15 pm July 7 at the Colpetty (Kollupitiya) Police Station in Colombo (see Ref B). Several sources have confirmed that the bomber was headed for the Ministerial offices of Douglas Devananda, Minister of Agricultural Marketing Development, Hindu Affairs, and Tamil Language Schools and Vocational Training (North), and leader of the anti-LTTE Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP). Apparently, the police became suspicious when the woman set off the metal detectors at the entrance to the ministerial office building and they escorted her to the police station. (Devananda's office building and the Colpetty police station are located several hundred yards apart on Galle Road near the chancery and the British High Commission.) In addition to the bomber, four police officers were killed when the bomber detonated herself inside the police station. Eleven others, including five police officers, were injured. This is the first suicide bombing in over two years and the first since the GSL and LTTE signed the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in February 2002.

No Americans Injured

[1](#)3. (U) There was no damage to the compound from the blast and no Embassy employees were injured. As far as we know, no other Americans were injured or involved. Sri Lankan officials are continuing to investigate the bombing, but there is no evidence that the bombing targeted Americans or foreigners. A warden message apprising American citizens in Sri Lanka of the July 7 event and warning against travel to the eastern town of Batticaloa was disseminated. A draft public announcement was sent to CA via e-mail for clearance throughout the Department. See Septel for readout of Mission July 7 EAC meeting.

Recent Attacks Against the LTTE in the East

[1](#)4. (C) The July 7 suicide bombing in Colombo follows attacks on LTTE cadres in the East on July 5, when "Black Tiger Day" is observed. (Black Tiger Day commemorates the first LTTE suicide bombing in 1987, and is usually marked with parades and somber ceremonies.) In two separate incidents, LTTE cadre were attacked in Batticaloa. One LTTE member was shot dead, while three cadre (including the LTTE Political Wing Leader for Batticaloa, Senathirajah) were wounded. News reports suggest that groups loyal to breakaway eastern LTTE leader Karuna were responsible, while pro-LTTE website TamilNet claimed the Sri Lankan military was involved in the shootings. The GSL issued a press release noting its concern about the shootings, stating, "These incidents jeopardize the law and order situation in the Eastern Province." Meanwhile, the newly appointed Army Commander

dispatched his Chief of Staff to study the security situation in the east and prevent further clashes between the LTTE and other armed factions. Press reports also noted that the Army will increase the number of troops in the East, but Army Spokesman Colonel Sumedha Perera said no decision had been made about increasing troop numbers.

15. (C) In a separate incident, the police, acting on a military tip, arrested 14 possibly pro-Karuna Tamil youth on July 5 at a Buddhist temple at Hingurakgoda (outside of Polonnaruwa) for possession of a variety of weapons and ammunition. The temple, frequently used as a rest stop for pilgrims, is run by a Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU) monk who unsuccessfully contested in Parliamentary elections earlier this year. Contrary to usual practice, the Tamil youths were arrested, but were not held for the 14 days the law allows. Instead, they were released on bail by a local magistrate. Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar told the Ambassador that there was significant political pressure by "certain Tamil groups" to release the youths.

Targeted Minister linked with Karuna

16. (C) While the suspected LTTE suicide bomber took everyone by surprise, there is little conjecture as to why Devananda was targeted. The Tamil politician has long been vocal in his opposition to the LTTE and has been closely linked of late with rebel Tiger Karuna. (Before entering politics, Devananda's EPDP was a paramilitary organization fighting against the LTTE.) During the June 21-22 public revelations of Karuna's April flight from the east to Colombo, numerous press reports noted Devananda was trying to facilitate Karuna's debut in the political world. On several occasions, the Minister has also offered to arrange meetings or communication between Karuna and Embassy officials, which we politely declined.

Suggested Press Guidance

17. (U) Mission suggests the following statements for press guidance:

Begin Text:

The United States is saddened by these senseless deaths and concerned by the effect that this incident, and recent violent incidents in Eastern Sri Lanka, may have on the peace process. It has consistently supported the millions of Sri Lankans who believe that the solution to the Island's ethnic problems lie in peace and not in war.

Although no one has claimed responsibility, the attack bears all the marking of the LTTE. As in the past, the United States calls on the Tigers to renounce terrorism and cease terrorist acts, including political assassination, and to comply with the terms of the ceasefire agreement that they signed. Violent actions of this sort raise doubts about their commitment to a political solution and illustrate why the Tamil Tigers remain on the U.S. list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). The U.S. calls on both the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to take all possible steps to halt the recent violence in Eastern Sri Lanka.

(If asked about news reports that the incident appeared in a "high security zone" near the American and British embassies, and the Prime Minister's office.)

The suicide bomber was picked up by the police outside a Government office and taken to a nearby police station. Those buildings are located near the American Embassy. We have no reason to believe that the incident was directed toward the Embassy.

End Text.

COMMENT

18. (C) Although the LTTE has not claimed responsibility for today's suicide bombing, it is almost certainly the work of the Tigers. The larger question now is whether the incident is an isolated one or the beginning of a concerted military effort by the LTTE to break the ceasefire. In recent weeks, Tiger rhetoric against the government has been increasing, in particular because of the GSL's allegedly role aiding Karuna and backing his forces in attacks against LTTE cadre in the East. Although the uptick in propaganda is not surprising for "Black July," a month which includes Black Tiger Day and the anniversary of the 1983 anti-Tamil riots in Colombo, their messages have consistently alleged that the government is eager to break the ceasefire. (In a representative example of many LTTE statements, LTTE Trincomalee political Leader Elilan said "The LTTE is prepared to face another war if it is thrust upon us, while the government will be held responsible for its outbreak.") Our assessment is that the

bombing was probably meant as a warning to the GSL that if it continues to support anti-LTTE actions by pro-Karuna groups, the LTTE can strike back -- an with a vengeance. END COMMENT.
LUNSTEAD